

Women start businesses for a variety of reasons. With the recent spate of corporate downsizing in large companies and the various changes in the marketplace, small businesses are becoming a vital part of the economic stability of the country.

Women often start businesses because they want flexibility in raising their children, they want to escape gender discrimination on the job, they hit the glass ceiling, and many desire to fulfill a dream of becoming an entrepreneur. We should continue to encourage this current trend of women-owned businesses by supporting the Women's Business Center Sustainability Act.

The Women's Business Centers offer women the tools necessary to launch businesses by providing resources and assistance with the development of a new business. This includes developing a business plan, conducting market research, developing a marketing strategy, and identifying financial services. The centers also offer practical advice and support for new business owners.

Access to this information is essential to success in small business. The Women's Business Centers provide a valuable service to aspiring entrepreneurs. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1497, the Women's Business Center Sustainability Act.

Women in America are starting firms at twice the rate of all businesses and currently, women-owned businesses offer jobs to one out of every five workers. As of 1999 there are approximately 9.1 million women-owned businesses in the U.S. which make up 38 percent of all firms in the country. Over 23 million employees worked for women-owned businesses, an increase of 262 percent over the 1987–1997 period.

Mr. Speaker, by the year 2000, it is expected that a woman will own one in every two businesses. Based on these statistics, it is clear that women are changing the face of American business and women-owned businesses need our support to continue their contributions to maintain a strong American economy.

H.R. 1497 will help women's businesses to continue to grow. This bill will create a pilot program to allow active centers to recompile, lower the grant level for these recompeting centers to \$125,000 and provide a criteria for the recompetition based on their track record. This bill will set aside a portion of the annual funding for a pilot program to allow active centers that are providing good services to recompile. If there is funding left from that recompetition portion we will allow centers that are no longer in the program to recompile as well. This bill will also increase the authorized level of the program from \$11 million to \$14.5 million.

Through proper allocation of the available funds, this framework will allow the program to continue to expand into economically and socially disadvantaged areas and allow minority women-owned businesses the opportunity to compete on an equal playing field. However, it is imperative that the selection and placement of women business centers is objective and equitable. Economically and socially disadvantaged areas must also be strongly considered

for women business centers to allow all people and areas to benefit from this bill.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1497 because women business centers provide training and counseling in topics such as finance, marketing, procurement and the Internet economy for women who want to start, maintain or expand their business. Currently, there are 37 women business centers currently funded and 22 graduated active sites operating in 36 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. All centers provide individual business counseling and access to SBA's programs and services. A number of the centers are also intermediaries for the SBA microloan and loan prequalification program. This wide variety of services are essential to the success of women-owned businesses and this support will ultimately have a positive impact on our economy overall.

Since the creation of this program in 1988 by a Democratic Congress, the Committee on Small Business has been actively finding ways to help this program improve and expand on their services and training. Originally the program was designed to help start-up centers by providing them with federal matching funds throughout a three year period until they could become self sufficient. This 3-year cycle was adjusted in 1997 to 5 years. An average of 10 new grants are awarded each year through a highly competitive process.

Centers received federal matching grants on a scale. The first year they received two federal dollars for every private dollar they raised, the second and third year they received the match on a 1 to 1 ratio and on their final years for every two private dollars they raised the federal government would match it with one dollar. The committee has been steadfast in addressing issues affecting women's business centers and H.R. 1497 will help in this regard.

I urge your support H.R. 1497, which continue to strengthen the American economy and raise the opportunities for success and economic prosperity for all Americans.

Mr. FORD. Mr. Speaker, thanks to my good friend TOM UDALL for his hard work in bringing H.R. 1497—the Women's Business Center Sustainability Act—to the floor this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1497 will help provide resources to women entrepreneurs in an effort to help level the playing field and provide opportunities to some of the most innovative and forward thinking businesspeople in our nation.

Today, women have finally begun to crack the once impenetrable "glass ceiling". In July, Carly Fiorina became CEO of Hewlett-Packard, the first female CEO of one of America's 20 largest corporations and women such as Meg Whitman, CEO of eBAY, and Joy Covey, CFO of Amazon.com, are revolutionizing how we live and work.

In my home state of Tennessee, we are fortunate to have Cynthia Trudell as president of Saturn Motors.

These individuals should serve as role models to aspiring businesswomen in the same way that Mia Hamm and Serena Williams have become role models in the world of sport. H.R. 1497 will help do just that.

It will allow more women entrepreneurs to use the resources of the Small Business Administration and it will enable their firms to receive assistance for a longer period of time,

especially during the crucial first years of operation.

It also extends the authorization of the current women's business center's program, a program that has been tremendously successful in encouraging women entrepreneurs.

Mr. Speaker women-owned businesses are a huge force for job creation and economic growth across the country and, in particularly, my hometown of Memphis, Tennessee.

According to recent surveys, women-owned businesses are growing at twice the rate of all business growth and are primary components of our high-wage high-tech driven economy. They now account for over 8 million businesses, a total of 36 percent of all U.S. firms.

In Memphis, women-owned businesses represent millions of dollars in sales and revenue and in Tennessee, the growth of women-owned firms increased 90 percent between 1988 and 1998. Nationally women businesses increased close to 80 percent over the same period.

Women-owned businesses, however, will continue to face significant challenges in the 21st century, particularly in the area of access to capital we must do all we can to expand opportunity for businesswomen. H.R. 1497 is a solid step in that direction.

Let me once again thank TOM UDALL and all of my colleagues for their hard work. I am proud to stand with them in support of H.R. 1497.

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BURR of North Carolina). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New York (Mrs. KELLY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1497, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. KELLY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 1497.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Sherman Williams, one of his secretaries.

TICKET TO WORK AND WORK INCENTIVES IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1999

Mr. ARCHER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1180) to amend the Social Security Act to expand the availability of